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ABSTRACT

There is no escaping the oral, but many people believe that it is detachable and not central. A dominant, assumed belief conveys the idea that spoken words (like knowledge in writing) are escapable. This belief is held by people who tacitly view speaking as a convenient tool that can be applied as necessary. Scholar-teachers know that it is not the case that language is one more commodity, even though it frequently becomes that. David Bleich explicates the issue in "Subjective Criticism," writing that the public commitment in language training schools is "rooted...in centuries of habitual religious thinking." History is important in the understanding of the spoken, but history is only useful if it is truly understood. When current writing pedagogy uses classical Greek rhetoric, it must acknowledge that rhetoric arose and became powerful in a culture dominated by the triad of slavery, rape, and imperialism, all of which not only informed the culture but enabled the culture to exist. A related pedagogical, oral issue also needs investigation: the revolution in thinking brought about by the electronic forms of consciousness, all of which are oral. While film has been elaborately theorized, video, including television, has not. Writing teachers need to recognize that writing, reading, and television all have oral bases and are not discrete activities to be cordoned off for school or leisure--this requires a change in the general attitude within the discipline of English studies toward writing pedagogy. (Contains 14 references and 4 notes.) (TB)

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Panel: Orality, Theory, and Pedagogy in the Composition Classroom

Orality, Classical Rhetoric, and the New Literacy

There is no escaping the oral. Why do so many people believe that it is detachable and not central? A dominant, assumed belief conveys the idea that spoken words (like knowledge, like writing) are escapable. They are thought to be escapable by people who tacitly view speaking as a convenient tool that we can own and apply as necessary. Scholar-teachers know that it is not the case that language is one more commodity, even though it frequently becomes that. The general population knows that it is not the case, as David Bleich explicates the issue in Subjective Criticism, where he writes that the public commitment --its belief -- in language training in schools is "rooted . . .in centuries of habitual religious thinking." (7) Neither group -- the language and literary specialists -- nor the general population -- has been able to articulate strongly enough the fact that the spoken word is inescapable and that it conditions

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literacy in every historical period, including our own. In addition, we have not articulated why the written word is inescapable; nevertheless, as James L. Kinneavy and others have pointed out, there is indeed a strong public belief that language study is crucial. Kinneavy has argued persuasively that each discipline must be able to train its own people to articulate what they do and why it is important; they must do this not only among themselves but to the general public as well.

Specialists and many people in the general population alike know or believe that language is not a container that holds meaning and that can be stored in the garage and used as necessary. Nevertheless, many people, including people who work in English studies, appear unable to articulate why this is the case and so are unable to work with our writing and reading students on this issue.

Bleich goes on to articulate the problem this way:

> "When knowledge is no longer conceived as objective, the purpose of pedagogical institutions from the nursery through the university is to synthesize knowledge rather than to pass it along: schools become the regular agency of subjective initiative. Because language use and the interpretive practices that follow from it underlie the processes of understanding, the pedagogical situations in which consciousness of language and literature is exercised establish the pattern of motives a student will bring to bear in his

> [sic] own pursuit of knowledge. For the development of subjective knowldge, motivation has to become a consciously articulable experience, and the configuration of classroom relationships . . . have to motivate such articulation" (p. 133).

These classroom relationships depend on the spoken word.[1] We writing teachers must empower our students with the spoken word not only as a central form of encoding, of performance which requires training and opportunity, not only as the center of a "new epistemology" (although this too is important); we must embrace the new oralism brought about by video, computers, etc., beginning with the invention of telegraphy in the 1840s (something that gave speech instantaneous, disembodied communication). We must not only work with the spoken word and with what Walter J. Ong identifies as its evanescence; we need to study with our students the voices of subjective life, particularly as they constitute memories of people who interact in various discourse communities.[2] Getting new theories is not enough. We must enact language differently. The language issues that face us are as great as those that confronted the Western European Renaissance, as Gregorgy Ulmer points out in Teletheory:

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[1]Even in large lecture classes which suppress students voices and so limit their learning, students voice their responses by speaking outside class or even by whispering during the lecture.

[2]I reject here the concept of "interpretive communities" from Stanley Fish and others because the term connotes passivity. Literary/cultural theorists such as Fish need to work more with pedagogy in general and writing in particular to get over this tendency toward passivity.

Grammatology in the Age of Video:

> "The failure of the Humanities disciplines to communicate with the public may be due in part to the fact that what separates specialized humanists from laymen [sic] is not only our conceptual apparatus and the discourses of the academy, but the very medium in which we work -- the printed word. It is time for the Humanities disciplines to establish our cognitive jurisdiction over the communications revolution" (p. viii).

Not only has a new idea arrived; a new performance has arrived: sophistic performance, what John Poulakos named "The Sophistic Turn" in "The Possibility of Rhetoric's Early Beginnings." A new oralism is here, and it resembles one very old kind of oralism, the merger of speaking and alphabetic writing that occurred in the fourth century BCE in and around Athens in Attic Greek.

THE TEACHING OF WRITING AND THE HISTORY OF WRITING

It is crucial to add here that I refer to Greek classical rhetoric not as an homage to a golden past, not as a way for us to "glow" together, as David Mair metaphorizes the truth and beauty school. The believers in this nonexistent golden past, who derive strongly from German philologists and historians, as Martin Bernal has shown us, continue to exert enormous control

over language studies in the United States and of course elsewhere. Bernal, in his critique of received Western history, writes:

> "By the middle of the 18th century, however, a number of Christian apologists were using the emerging paradigm of 'progress', with its presupposition that 'later is better', to promote the Greeks at the expense of the Egyptians. These strands of thought soon merged with two others that were becoming dominant at the same time: racism and Romanticism. Thus chapter IV also outlines the development of racism based on skin colour in late-17th-century England, alongside the increasing importance of the American colonies, with their twin policies of extermination of the Native Americans and enslavement of African Blacks. This racism pervaded the thought of Locke, Hume and other English thinkers. Their influence -- and that of the new European explorers of other continents -- was important at the university of Göttingen, founded in 1734 by George II, Elector of Hanover and King of England, and forming a cultural bridge between Britain and Germany. It is not surprising, therefore, that the first 'academic' work on human racial classification -- which naturally put Whites, or to use his new term, 'Caucasians', at the head of the hierarchy -- was written in the 1770s by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, a professor at Göttingen"

pp. 27-28).

Historical rhetoric and writing cannot be useful for current writing pedagogy if it replicates this racist past. When current writing pedagogy uses classical Greek rhetoric, it must be acknowledged that it arose and became powerful in a culture dominated by the triad of slavery, rape, and imperialism, all three of which not only informed the culture but enabled the culture to exist at all. No study of classical rhetoric and writing practices should take place without a thorough study of these three related systems, just as the study of, say, United States writing or what some people call literary discourse should also be thoroughly grounded in these issues. It might be said that the main rhetorical legacy of ancient Greece given to the United States is not knowledge but the continuation of slave culture and rape culture.

INCLUDING THE SPOKEN WORD OF OTHERS

The spoken word is in the process of being theorized by some African American rhetoricians and so helps to correct some of these problems. For example, Joyce I. Middleton, in "Oral Memory and the Teaching of Literacy: Some Implications from Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon," writes:

> "'Oral memory' is a concept that refers to a means of storing cultural knowledge within the personal human memory without the aid of writing. It is not the self-

> conscious, artificial memory system that is more familiar to rhetoricians, memoriae rerum and memoriae verborum. That 'art of memory' is strongly influenced by literacy. Many recent works of interest to the rhetoric and composition community use the phrase 'oral memory,' but the writers who refer to it have not defined it in any formal way (see, e.g., Brandt; Goody, Havelock; Lentz; Ong)" (p. 113).

White teachers of writing need to learn the oralism of the African-American communities discussed by Middleton and others[3] and the racism of standard histories discussed by Bernal.

A related pedagogical, oral issue also needs further investigation: the revolution in thinking brought about by the electronic forms of consciousness, all of which are partly oral; while film theory has been elaborately theorized, video, including television, has not. Recent texts such as Channels of Discourse, a collection of essays edited by Robert C. Allen; Ulmer's Teletheory; and Kathleen Hall Jamieson's Eloquence in an Electronic Age have begun to examine video from three different disciplines. All but one of these important texts have left something out: historical rhetoric. That text is Kathleen Hall Jamieson's Eloquence in an Electronic Age.[4] In this book, she

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[3]See, for example, Jacqueline Jones Royster's "Perspectives on the Intellectual Tradition of Black women Writers."

[4]I refer you here as well to Jamieson's televisual performance/persuasion on C-SPAN, Cable News Network, NBC, and other television locations. During the 1992 presidential campaign, for example, Jamieson provided piercing analysis -- through her

offers us television theory in the form of work on the associative grammar of television (for example, p. 13). Television, as she claims, brings back the so-called "womanly way of speaking" (80). She writes:

> "By embedding a condemnation of effeminate speech in the language in which eloquence was defined, theorists ensure that if a woman rose to speak she would embrace 'manly' norms, women created an ironic situation for their descendants. The age of television, not even envisioned as the Grimke sisters took to the circuit, would invite the style once spurned as 'womanly." In the television age, men would have to learn and women recapture the 'womanly' style." (80)

In other words, the male style -- the one referred to by Ong as remaining in such words as a "defense" of a thesis or dissertation, the engagement in oral battle -- is out of style (in more ways than one) in the televisual world. Ronald Reagan, whose work Jamieson analyzes closely, may have been enormously successful with his "manly" ethos projected from large screens and small, but his televisual style is thoroughly "womanly":

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own enactment of a powerful rhetoric -- of the electronic speaking (televisual encoding) of those people who ran for president. Thorough knowledge of historical rhetoric pervades all the written and spoken work of Jamieson. It needs to pervade the work of more English teachers. Jamieson enacts rhetoric in the highly politicized world not only of CNN and NBC but as Dean of Communication at the Annenberg School at the Unniversity of Pennsylvania. She has chosen to communicate her work with the general public -- as have, for example, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Hans Magnus Enzensberger.

intimate, caring, concerned.

The spoken word and its position in currrent literacy can be helped by the writing of new histories of rhetoric. The reason for this is that historical rhetoric -- and especially classical rhetoric -- is based to a large extent on the spoken word. Rhetoric offers us ways to theorize the spoken word. Classical rhetoric remains an important source for this; it offers some strategies for understanding the spoken word. Many scholar-teachers who work on video -- for example, Ulmer -- have rigorously avoided historical rhetoric. If they would address it, they would find help.

The empowerment of voice is available in one version of classical Greek rhetoric. It is non-Platonic in the form of the fourth century BCE writer Isocrates, the so-called founder of the liberal arts. The term "nonplatonic" distinguishes Isocrates' writings from those of his competitor Plato, whose version of philosophy set the traditional philosophical, historical lines of action and inquiry that remain entrenched in our schools and in our writing classes. Isocrates would not speak in public; instead, he chose the thrilling and powerful medium of writing. Isocrates is a Sophist who recognized the power of writing early and exploited it thoroughly because he understood changes in consciousness that the technology of writing helped to bring about. Isocrates' pedagogy offers us a crucial alternative to the Aristotelian agenda that has tended to dominate not just classical rhetoric and writing studies (as, for example, in the

work of Samuel Ijsseling in Rhetoric and Philosophy in Conflict) but twentieth-century English studies as well.

Writing teachers need to recognize that writing, reading, and the making of television all have oral bases and are not discrete activities to be cordoned off for school work or leisure activities. The ways that all of us behave are heavily conditioned by the oralism of video, particularly television, and the newest version of the mingling of the spoken and the written. This strategy will require a change in the general attitude within the discipline of English studies toward writing pedagogy. We need to see the centrality of students' spoken words and written words so that they are not marginalized.

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